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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9637
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T BAGHDAD 000514

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2017

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT TALABANI COMMENTS ON RECONCILIATION,
HYDROCARBON LAW, DEBA'ATHIFICATION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. In a February 10 meeting at President Talabani's residence, Talabani told the Ambassador that he hoped the Sadrists would agree to reconciliation efforts with the Sunni IIP. He agreed that the hydrocarbon law was a priority and that the Kurds needed to cooperate on its passage. The Ambassador said PM Maliki hoped for Cabinet endorsement of the law on February 15. With the February 8 passage of the 2007 budget, de-Ba'athification, reconciliation, and the oil law are priorities, stated Talabani. END SUMMARY

Reconciliation

¶2. (S) President Jalal Talabani discussed reconciliation efforts briefly with Ambassador Khalilzad on February 10, noting that a recent letter to the Ambassador from VP Tariq Al Hashemi had been the VP's personal views, which would require some alteration to be acceptable to others. The President passed the Ambassador a three-paragraph statement he was trying to get the Sadrists to sign (or recommend amendments that would allow them to sign) in the context of mediation between the IIP and the Sadrists.

Hydrocarbon Law / Kurdish Concerns

¶3. (S) The Ambassador stated that agreements in Erbil regarding the hydrocarbon law were positive and offered a constructive basis on which to discuss the issue with the PM. The Ambassador recalled his meeting with the PM February 9, in which the PM said he wanted the hydrocarbon law approved by his Cabinet by Thursday, February 15, in preparation for submission to the CoR (Council of Representatives); the Ambassador hoped that timeline would be met. Talabani and the Ambassador agreed that KRG Oil Minister Ashti needed to play a more constructive role in developing the hydrocarbon law.

¶4. (S) The President said he had told KRG President Masoud Barzani three things in a recent conversation: 1) he needs to remain calm and not over-react to pressure on elections and other delicate political issues, 2) oil issues must be settled satisfactorily and in cooperation with the USG, and 3) the Kurdish role in creating a moderate front with Arab groups in Iraqi politics is critical -- the Kurds need to play a constructive role as part of Iraq.

De-Ba'athification Law

¶5. (S) President Talabani said he wanted to finalize a draft de-Ba'athification law that the Presidency Council could propose to the CoR. He had not decided which VP might head up that project, but he hoped to have a draft in short order.

The Ambassador said he would provide Talabani with ideas for a "simple and clear" de-Ba'athification law by February 11, an offer which the President appreciated. Citing passage of the 2007 budget by the CoR February 8, Talabani said the approval followed a "deal with the PM" on Peshmerga funding; with the budget in place, priorities would be deBa'athification, reconciliation and the oil law.
SPECKHARD